

The Renaissance Begins

Prepare to Read

Objectives

In this section you will

1. Find out why Italy was the birthplace of the Renaissance.
2. Understand how literature and art were transformed during the Renaissance.

Taking Notes

As you read, look for reasons why the Renaissance began in Italy and how literature and art changed during this period. Copy the outline below, and record your findings in it.

I. Why the Renaissance started in Italy

- A.
- B.

II. The effects of the Renaissance

- A.
- B.



Target Reading Skill

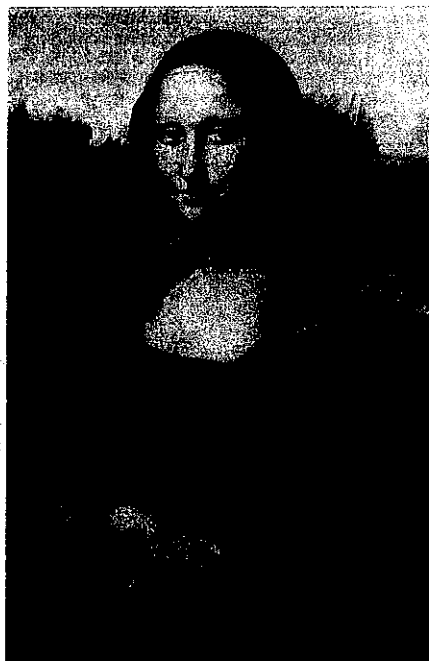
Identify Causes and Effects

To understand a historical period or event, it is helpful to know what caused it to happen and what effects it had. As you read this section, identify the causes of the Renaissance in Italy, as well as the effects. Write the causes and effects in your Taking Notes diagram.

Key Terms

- **Renaissance** (REN uh sahns) *n.* a widespread change in culture that took place in Europe, beginning with the 1300s.
- **humanism** (HYOO muh niz um) *n.* an interest in the classics

© Leonardo da Vinci "Mona Lisa" © Musée du Louvre / Réunion des Musées Nationaux / Art Resource



La Gioconda (lah joh KAHN duh) is another name for the *Mona Lisa*.

The *Mona Lisa* is perhaps the most famous piece of art in the world. It is one of the masterpieces created by the great Italian artist, Leonardo da Vinci (lee uh NAHR doh duh VIN chee). Like many of da Vinci's works, however, the *Mona Lisa* may have never been finished. It is possible that da Vinci was drawn to another project without finishing the painting, as he had done on other projects. Da Vinci was not only a painter. He was also one of the world's greatest inventors and scientists.

The story of da Vinci and the *Mona Lisa* reveals much about the Renaissance. This is the term historians use for the period between 1300 and 1650 in Europe. During that time, the culture of Europe changed dramatically. Artists used new skills and techniques to create works of great beauty and charm. Scholars began looking at the world and its people in new ways. The spirit of the Renaissance is clearly seen in the life of Leonardo da Vinci. His great skills and wide interests reflect much of the spirit and character of the era.

The Renaissance Begins in Italy

The Renaissance was a widespread change in culture that took place in Europe beginning with the 1300s. The movement began in Italy.

Look at the map on this page, and notice Italy's place on the Mediterranean Sea. Because of this location, Italy became a center of European trade with the rich lands of the East during the late Middle Ages. While feudalism still dominated the rest of Europe, Italy's merchants were building great fortunes.

Italy's trade was based in its cities. Over time, these cities became centers of power and wealth. Successful merchants bought up feudal lands, and many nobles moved to the cities to seek their fortunes. The most powerful Italian cities became independent city-states. They were not under the control of a king or a noble. Even the Roman Catholic Church held little power in these cities.



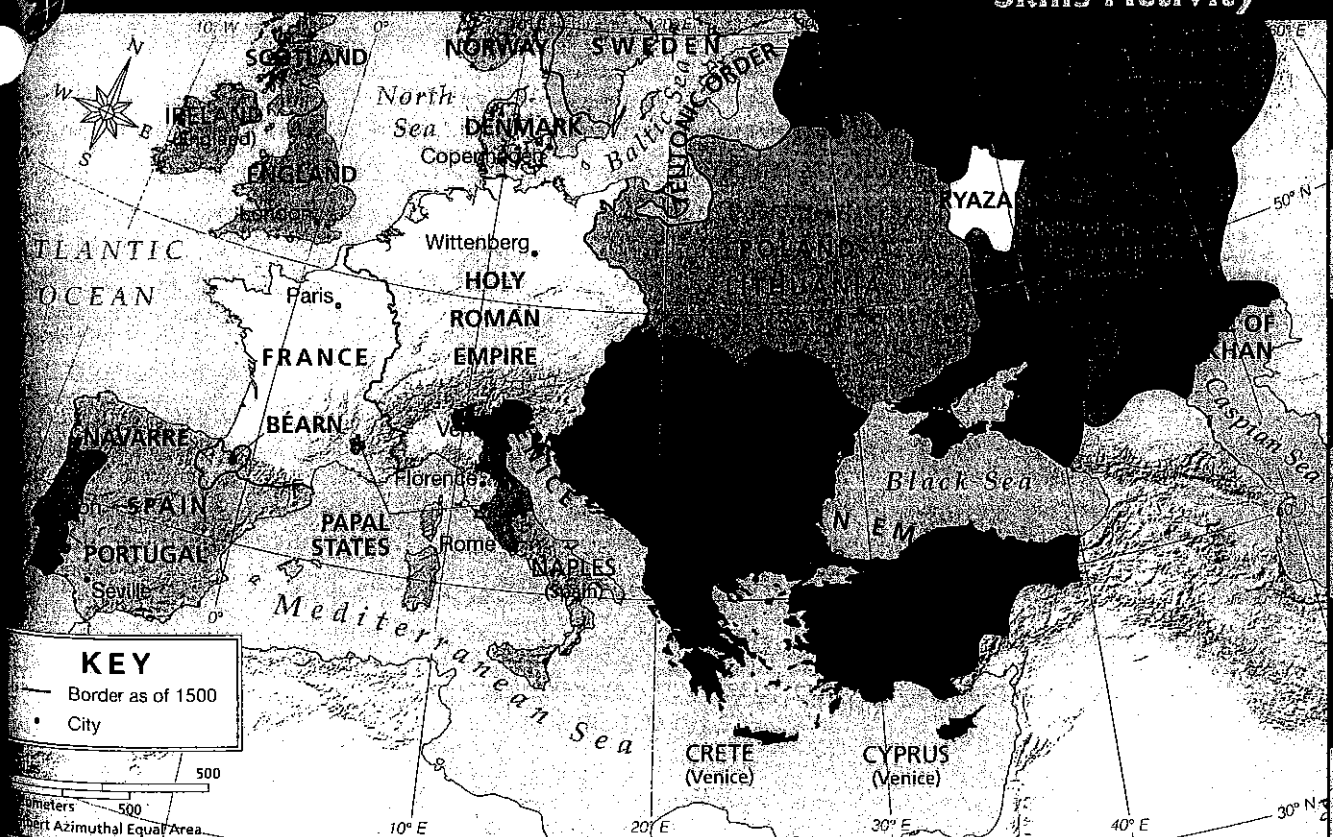
Identify Causes and Effects

What causes led to the birth of the Renaissance in Italy?

✓ **Reading Check** Why did the Renaissance begin in Italy?

Europe in 1500

MAP MASTER™ Skills Activity



Human-Environment Interaction Italy was a center of European trade during the Renaissance. **Explain** Why did Italy have an advantage in trading with eastern lands? **Predict** How might the rest of Europe overcome Italy's advantage in trading with the East?

Go Online

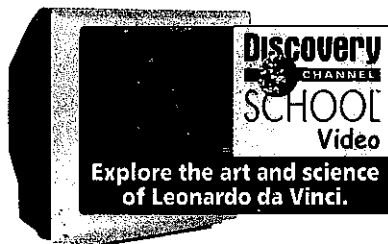
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Renaissance Art

Raphael depicts the great thinkers of Ancient Greece.

Analyze *Why do you think Raphael included the Greek philosophers in this painting?*



Renaissance Art and Literature

The Renaissance is celebrated today as a time of great artistic achievement. Artists in all fields created stunning works. These efforts marked a sharp change from the art of the Middle Ages. During that period, art had focused on the Church. That focus began to change in the 1300s.

Literature As you have read, a new social system was taking shape in Italy's cities. Life no longer centered on feudalism and the Church. Many writers began to turn their attention to something new—or, rather, to something very old. These were the ideas and writings of the ancient Romans and Greeks. The classical works focused on worldly issues, not religious matters. They explored nature, beauty, and other concepts long ignored in medieval life. This new interest in the classics is known as **humanism**.

The first great humanist was Francesco Petrarch (frahn CHES koh PEA trahrk) (1304–1374). Even as a child, he had loved the works of Cicero (sis uh roh) and other Latin writers. Petrarch's father disapproved of his son's tastes. He once became so angry that he threw Petrarch's books into a fire. Yet Petrarch continued to study the ancient Romans. His love of the classics is clearly seen in the flawless poetry for which he is known. Petrarch's sonnets reveal a view of love and nature that is far different from medieval sonnets. He also collected the works of many Latin authors.

Visual Art Medieval art had dealt mostly with religious topics. Like Renaissance writers, however, artists of the Renaissance began to focus on nature and the human form. Painters and sculptors still created religious scenes. These works, however, showed the human body with great accuracy and detail.

You have read about Leonardo da Vinci and his great works. Da Vinci also became famous for the more than 4,000 notebook pages that he filled with sketches and notes about the world around him. The Italian Renaissance also produced such masters as Michelangelo (my kul AN juh loh). His greatest work may be the famous ceiling of the Sistene Chapel. Like da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, this work is among the most beloved and recognized paintings in history.

In the early to mid-1400s, the sculptor Donatello (doh nuh TEL oh) worked in the city of Florence, creating life-like sculptures of the human body. He was inspired by the Greeks and Romans of antiquity. Some of Donatello's most famous works are a series of sculptures of the Biblical figure David. Donatello was a master of many techniques, using a variety of materials, including marble and bronze, for his sculptures.

Reading Check What was the main focus of Renaissance visual artists?

Citizen Heroes

Cosimo de Medici

The support of wealthy city residents made possible the flowering of art during the Renaissance. One of the best-known supporters of art was Cosimo de Medici (KOH zee moh duh MED uh chee). As head of a powerful family in Florence, Cosimo de Medici paid for many art works and promoted the study of the Greek language.



Cosimo de Medici

Section 1 Assessment

Key Terms

Review the key terms at the beginning of this section. Use each term in a sentence that explains its meaning.

Target Reading Skill

Explain the causes that brought about the Renaissance in Italy.

Comprehension and Critical Thinking

1. (a) **Recall** What activity helped transform life in Italy in the late Middle Ages?

(b) Identify Cause and Effect

What affect did the rise of cities have on feudal life in Italy?

2. (a) **Identify** What was the major influence on writers of the Renaissance?

(b) **Summarize** How did the interest in Greek and Roman classical literature affect Renaissance authors?

3. (a) **Explain** How did the focus of Italian artists change during the Renaissance?

(b) **Analyze Images** What details from Raphael's painting on page 432 illustrate the key features of Renaissance art?

Writing Activity

From the perspective of a person living in an Italian city-state at the start of the Renaissance, write a letter to a relative living somewhere in feudal Europe. Describe some of the changes you see taking place in the world around you.

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